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PATENT



IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of BUTLER et al.

Application No.

Examiner:

Filed: (Herewith)

Group Art Unit:

For: MANAGEMENT OF SPEECH TECHNOLOGY MODULES
IN AN INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE SYSTEM

CLAIM OF FOREIGN PRIORITY

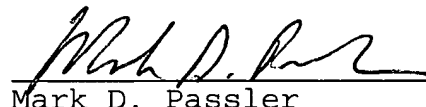
Box Patent Application
Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

Priority under the International Convention for the
Protection of Industrial Property and under 35 U.S.C. §119 is
hereby claimed for the above-identified patent application, based
upon United Kingdom Application No. 0004097.2 filed February 22,
2000, and a certified copy of this application is submitted
herewith which perfects the Claim of Foreign Priority.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: 8/17/00



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Docket No. 6169-179
WP/164414

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The Patent Office
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Cardiff Road
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I, the undersigned, being an officer duly authorised in accordance with Section 74(1) and (4) of the Deregulation & Contracting Out Act 1994, to sign and issue certificates on behalf of the Comptroller-General, hereby certify that annexed hereto is a true copy of the documents as originally filed in connection with the patent application identified therein.

In accordance with the Patents (Companies Re-registration) Rules 1982, if a company named in this certificate and any accompanying documents has re-registered under the Companies Act 1980 with the same name as that with which it was registered immediately before re-registration save for the substitution as, or inclusion as, the last part of the name of the words "public limited company" or their equivalents in Welsh, references to the name of the company in this certificate and any accompanying documents shall be treated as references to the name with which it is so re-registered.

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Signed

Dated

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Form 1/77

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22 FEB 2000
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Request for grant of a patent

The Patent Office

Concept House
Cardiff Road
Newport
South Wales NP9 1RH

1.	Your reference	GB9000034GB1		
2.	Patent application number (The Patent Office will fill in this part)	0004097.2	22 FEB 2000	
3.	Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)	INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES CORPORATION Armonk New York 10504 United States of America		
	Patents ADP number (if you know it)	519637001		
	If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation	State of New York United States of America		
4.	Title of the invention	MANAGEMENT OF SPEECH TECHNOLOGY MODULES IN AN INTERACTIVE VOICE-RESPONSE SYSTEM		
5.	Name of your agent (if you have one)	P Waldner		
	"Address for Service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)	IBM United Kingdom Limited Intellectual Property Department Hursley Park Winchester Hampshire SO21 2JN		
	Patents ADP number (if you know it)	7104417001		
6.	If you are declaring priority from one or more earlier patent applications, give the country and the date of filing of the or of each of these earlier applications and (if you know it) the or each application number	Country	Priority App No (if you know it)	Date of filing (day/month/year)
7.	If this application is divided or otherwise derived from an earlier UK application, give the number and the filing date of the earlier application	No of earlier application	Date of filing (day/month/year)	

Pat Form 1/77

THE PATENT OFFICE

8. Is a statement of inventorship and of right to grant of a patent required in support of this request? (Answer 'yes' if:
a) any applicant named in part 3 is not an inventor, or
b) there is an inventor who is not named as an applicant, or
c) any named applicant is a corporate body.)

Yes

9. Enter the number of sheets for any of the following items you are filing with this form. Do not count copies of the same document

Continuation sheets of this form

Description	16 ✓
Claim(s)	1 ✓
Abstract	1 ✓ WM
Drawing(s)	2 ✓

10. If you are also filing any of the following, state how many against each item.

Priority documents

Translations of priority documents

Statement of inventorship and right to grant of a patent (Patents Form 1/77) 1

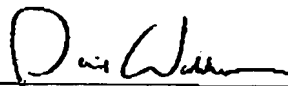
Request for preliminary examination and search (Patents Form 9/77)

Request for substantive examination (Patents Form 10/77)

Any other documents (please specify)

Fee Sheet (FS1)

11. I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application

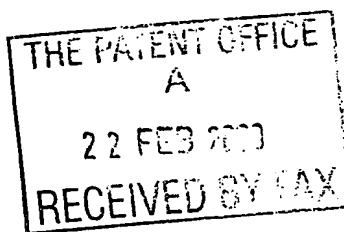

Signature

22 February 2000
Date

12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom P Waldner
01962 816057

Patents Form 7/77

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Statement of inventorship and of
right to grant of a patent

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Concept House
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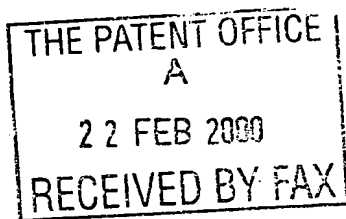
1.	Your reference	GB9000034GB1	
2.	Patent application number (if you know it)	0004097.2	22 FEB 2000
3.	Full name of the or of each applicant	INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES CORPORATION	
4.	Title of invention	MANAGEMENT OF SPEECH TECHNOLOGY MODULES IN AN INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE SYSTEM	
5.	State how the applicant(s) derived the right from the inventor(s) to be granted a patent	By employment and by agreement	
6.	How many, if any, additional Patents Forms 7/77 are attached to this form?		
7.	I/We believe that the person(s) named over the page (and on any extra copies of this form) is/are the inventor(s) of the invention which the above patent application relates to.		
		 Signature	22 February 2000 Date
8.	Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom	P Waldner 01962 816057	



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Patents Form 7/77

Enter the full names, addresses and postcodes of the inventors in the boxes and underline the surnames



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If there are more than three inventors, please write their names and addresses on the back of another Patents Form 7/77 and attach it to this form

REMINDER

Have you signed the form?

Patents ADP number (if known)

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MANAGEMENT OF SPEECH TECHNOLOGY MODULES
IN AN INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE SYSTEM

FIELD OF INVENTION

This invention relates to the management, in an interactive voice response system, of a plurality of speech technology modules. In particular it relates to an apparatus and a method for dynamically determining which of a plurality of speech technology modules to use during voice interaction between the system and a user.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

In today's business environment, the telephone is used for many purposes: placing catalogue orders; checking airline schedules; querying prices; reviewing account balances; notifying customers of price or schedule changes; and recording and retrieving messages. Often, each telephone call involves a service representative talking to a caller, asking questions, entering responses into a computer, and reading information to the caller from a terminal screen. This process can be automated by substituting an interactive voice response system with speech recognition for the operator.

An IVR may have more than one speech recognition engine so that for a particular interaction the best engine may be selected and used. Patent publication WO 98/10413 discloses a speech processing system and a method concerning a speech processing system which comprises a number of speech recognition modules and speech output modules which are each provided for a given type of speech recognition. Depending on the application, the modules, which are each provided for a given type of speech recognition or speech input, are selected, activated and parameterized by a module selection-device

The application is necessary for defining the parameters needed in the speech recognition, focusing on the function of the particular interaction ignores that certain speech recognition engines are better than others for certain languages. Each module in the prior art is configured for a specific application. Most recognition engines have different lexicons for the range of functions but it is the full lexicon which can determine an engines suitability for a language. For instance, one type of speech recognition engine is preferred for certain languages whereas IBM

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ViaVoice is a good general all rounder. Choosing one speech recognition module according to application alone is not entirely satisfactory when the application may be multilingual and there is a need for improvement.

5 SUMMARY OF INVENTION

In one aspect of the present invention there is provided an interactive voice response (IVR) system as described in claim 1.

10 The capabilities of recogniser required for a particular point in an application goes beyond simply the "task" that the application is trying to achieve and that it is also necessary to take into account the environment within which the application is currently operating. Relevant factors in
15 the environment would include: the language of the dialog, the regional accent, and the characteristics of the telephone voice channel.

The environment is property of each interaction and may be modified by the application programmer. The environment is also a property of the application. Knowledge of the actual speech recognition technology is not
20 needed within the application since the speech recognition technology depends on the environment property which is part of the application. Furthermore the environment is dynamically modifiable property which may be changed by the application during execution.

25 A further complexity with speech recognition over the telephone is the type of phone network that the call originates from. The characteristics of the voice channel from a land line telephone is different from that from a mobile telephone, and that from a telephone using Voice over IP (Internet telephony) is different again. This is due
30 to the use of differing voice compression techniques. In order to provide accurate and reliable speech recognition it is necessary to have a language model for the recogniser that matches the characteristics of the voice channel, so a different model is needed for each of land line, mobile and IP telephony. In the prior art, it would be necessary to attach one
35 recogniser for each of these language models to every call to allow for calls from all types of telephone.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

In order to promote a fuller understanding of this and other aspects of the present invention, an embodiment will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 represents an IVR platform with integrated ASR modules of the present embodiment; and

Figure 2 represents the steps of the method of the present embodiment.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring to Figure 1, there is shown a schematic representation of a voice processing system 10 of the present embodiment comprising: voice processing platform 12 and voice processing software 14; and telephone lines 18. Voice processing system 10 supports up to 60 E1 or 48 T1 telephone lines 18 connected through network interface 28 to connect callers to the voice system. The telephone lines can come directly from the public telephone network or through a private branch exchange (PBX) 30. If call volumes require more than 60 E1 or 48 T1 lines, additional voice processing systems can be connected together through a LAN and managed from a single node.

The voice processing platform 12 comprises: a personal computer with an Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus or a Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) bus 13, running Microsoft Windows NT; one or more Dialogic or Aculab network interface cards 28 for connecting the required type and number of external telephone lines 18; and one or more Dialogic voice processing cards 46. A dedicated voice data bus, System Computing Bus (SCbus) 23, connects the network card 28 and the DSP card 46 which avoids data flow congestion on the PCI system bus and increases voice processing speed. A hardware ASR would receive voice data over the SCbus 23.

The voice processing software 14 comprises IBM's DirectTalk Beans for Windows (previously known as Voice Response Beans) which is a powerful, flexible, yet cost-effective voice processing software. Although the embodiment is described for Windows, an equivalent platform is also available for the UNIX environment from the IBM Corporation, in which case

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a maximum of 12 digital trunks per system (360 E1 or 288 T1 channels) may be supported. Used in conjunction with voice processing hardware, the voice processing software can connect to a Public Telephone Network directly or via a PBX. It is designed to meet the need for a fully automated, versatile, computer telephony system. DirectTalk Beans not only helps develop voice applications, but also provides a wealth of facilities to help run and manage them. DirectTalk Beans can be expanded into a networked system with centralized system management, and it also provides an open architecture, allowing customisation and expansion of the system at both the application and the system level.

The voice processing software 14 comprises: a telephony server 40; speech recognition servers 48A and 48B; a dialogue manager (DM) server 50; a natural language understanding (NLU) server 52; a development work area (not shown); an application manager (not shown); a node manager (not shown); a general server interface 38; voice application 16; a module parameter database 22; voice segments 24; text segments 26; speech technology selector 60; and speech parameter selector 62. A general server interface 38 manages all communications between the component programs of voice processing software 14. A server is a program that provides services to the voice response application 16. The modular structure of the voice processing software 14 and the open architecture of the general server interface (GSI) allows development of servers that are unique to specific applications, for example, a user-defined server can provide a bridge between Voice Response and another product.

Telephony server 40 interfaces the network interface 28 and provides telephony functionality to the voice response application.

The speech recognition servers 48A and 48B are large-vocabulary, speaker-independent continuous ASRs such as IBM ViaVoice or Dragon System ASR. In this embodiment the speech recognition servers are the speech technology modules although speech recognition is only one example of a speech technology and other functions such as tone recognition or text to speech could be used as examples of the speech technology. Although the speech recognition servers 48A and 48B are performed in software for this embodiment, one or both could be embodied in hardware.

Natural language understanding (NLU) server 52 interprets the user's intention as expressed by key items (words or phrases) in the text output from the ASR. The NLU server is based on IBM ViaVoice NLU Toolkit.

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DM server 50, based on IBM ViaVoice NLU Toolkit, compares the NLU output of the user's intentions against the information requirements of the specific application or service and directs the IVR application to play an appropriate response or prompt to the user.

5

The development work area allows the creation and modification of a voice-processing application. The application manager executes the voice response application. The node manager allows monitoring of the status of application sessions and telephone lines and allows the issue of commands to start and stop application sessions.

10

Voice response application 16 controls the interaction between the voice system 10 and a caller. Applications comprise Telephony Java Beans, which incorporates the power and ease-of-use of Java programming language. A voice application controls the playing of recorded voice segments 24 or synthesized text segments 26. The voice processing system can run up to sixty applications simultaneously ranging from one voice response application running on all sixty lines to sixty different voice response applications 16 each running on a separate line.

15

20

Speech technology selector 60 consists of a mapping configuration of environment properties to speech recognition modules 48A and 48B. During initialisation, the speech technology selector 60 reads the configuration and loads it into a hashtable with the environment (e.g. locale) as the key.

25

Speech parameter selector 62 has configuration information consisting of a series of mappings from a combination of locale and task to the corresponding recognition parameters. During initialisation, and optionally when updated at a later time, speech parameter selector 62 reads the configuration and loads it into a hash table using a combination of the Locale and Task as the key.

30

When the application runs and requires speech recognition the current environment is passed to the speech technology selector 60. Speech technology selector 60 looks up the locale in the hash table and finds out which technology is required. The speech technology selector 60 creates an instance of the selected technology module and passes the request for speech recognition or text-to-speech to that instance.

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5 The Speech parameter selector 62 then combines the Locale and Task to create a key for its configuration hash table, looks up the parameters for the required speech recognition. It then starts the recognition engine. Once the recognition technology is started, the voice response unit starts playing the prompt to the caller, possibly using text-to-speech, waits for a response from the recogniser and passes on the response at the end.

10 IBM DirectTalk Beans are fully compatible with the JavaBeans™ specification, allowing anyone who can use a visual application builder such as IBM VisualAge for Java, or the Java programming language, to provide a telephone interface to business applications. The *DirectTalk Beans General Information and Planning* guide provides more background information about how these beans can fit into an enterprise systems, and what kinds of application can be written with the beans.

15 A JavaBean is a reusable Java component. JavaBeans, commonly referred to as "beans", can be low-level or combined into higher-level beans that can be used over and over to create applications.

20 The DirectTalk Beans are high-level beans for components of a typical voice response application, such as Menu, MenuItem, Form, Announcement, and EntryField. These beans are similar to the beans used for creating graphical user interfaces: Menu, MenuItem, Label, TextField, and so on. Any differences in terminology reflect the essential differences between
25 auditory and visual interfaces. The essential similarities between the tasks of building a graphical user interface and building an auditory user interface have been fully exploited. It should be easy for someone who has developed a graphical user interface to develop an equivalent interactive voice response application to support the same end-user tasks, for example,
30 to add, change, delete, and review records in a database. The DirectTalk Beans comprise: The DirectTalk bean, Action beans, Media data beans, The EventFilter bean, and Compatibility beans.

35 The DirectTalk bean establishes communication between a Java voice application and the base DirectTalk system, and also provides access to simple call control functions:

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waiting for a call, returning a call when finished, making an outgoing call, and handing a call over to another application. Other call control functions, such as call transfer and conferencing are handled by the call control beans.

5

The action beans can be thought of as "voice interface widgets", which use an action method to present or "play" output to the caller and, in some cases, accept input (which can be key input or voice). Menu allows a caller to press keys or say command words, to select an option. The Menu bean itself handles all the usual error conditions: timeout, invalid key entered, and so on. MenuItem includes both the voice description for the item, and the telephone key or speech recognition word that is associated with selecting it. EntryField allows the caller to enter data, by pressing keys or speaking. The EntryField includes both the voice description and the length of time allowed, and, if necessary, the key to be recognized as an ENTER key. The EntryField bean can easily be extended to allow checking for various formats: currency, date, credit card number, and so on.

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Media data beans specify the sounds that the caller hears. To help you to create international applications, these beans have a locale property, which specifies country and language if applicable. A style property allows different presentation styles when appropriate. The media data beans cannot "play" themselves to the caller: they are played by the Action beans. E.g. VoiceSegment specifies recorded voice data. The VoiceSegment bean is used both for output and for input recorded by the VoiceRecorder bean. AudioCurrency specifies a currency amount to be spoken.

30

The EventFilter bean. Normally you would take different actions depending on whether a bean is successful or fails. The EventFilter bean makes it possible to fine-tune the next action, according to the exact completion code from a bean.

35

The Compatibility beans are provided only to maintain compatibility with DirectTalk for AIX state tables and DirectTalk/2 or DirectTalk for Windows user actions. The recommended approach to new voice application development is to use the Java beans for all applications. If the beans don't do what you want, contact us, using the address at the back of this

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book or on the web page, and we'll consider any suggestions. But if you already have voice applications that you want to integrate with your new Java applications, the compatibility beans provide you with the means. E.g. The `StateTable` compatibility bean allows you to invoke a `DirectTalk` for AIX state table. The `UserAction` compatibility bean allows you to invoke a `DirectTalk/2` or `DirectTalk` for Windows user action. The `UserActionVariable` compatibility bean allows a `DirectTalk/2` or `DirectTalk` for Windows user action to access system variables.

All of the base `DirectTalk` products use the concept of "language", and some languages are defined in terms of language and the country it is spoken in: for example, Canadian French as opposed to French spoken in France. In Java, this is explicitly acknowledged, by using the term `locale` to refer to language-and-country. Each locale is identified by an ISO-defined code, which comprises a language component and a country component: for example, `fr_CA` for Canadian French and `fr_FR` for French in France. Optionally, personalized locale identifiers can be created, including an optional user-defined variant. For example `en_US_fred`. The maximum length of a locale identifier is 18 characters, so the variant part can be up to 12 characters.

`Locale` is used for identifying precisely what is to be spoken to the caller: the words, accent, and phrasing used (by using the variant component of the locale identifier, you can also specify any other characteristics you want). In other words, locale is used to identify the voice segments to be used. It is also used for determining the technology to be used for text-to-speech and speech recognition. Furthermore it may optionally alter the logic of your application.

A `Locale` has the format '`ll_CC_vvvvv`' where: `ll` is the language code, such as "en" for English, "fr" for French; `CC` is the country code, such as "US" for the United States of America, "GB" for the United Kingdom; and `vvvvv` is an arbitrary string of arbitrary length, such as "mobile", "land line", "Yorkshire". The language and country codes are usually taken from those defined in the ISO standard.

Each IVR system node has a default locale and optionally each application can have a default locale, overriding the system default locale. An application developer can specify the default locale in the

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Application Properties. Furthermore it is possible to override the system default locale when the application is executing. When the application starts, the current locale is either the system default locale or the application default locale, if one has been specified. The current locale affects only the running of the voice application: it does not affect anything else in the Java Runtime Environment.

Each bean can have its locale property set but to make an application completely language-independent, one should not specify the locale on any Media data beans. To make the application speak a specific language, simply set the default locale of the system: all applications in that node will speak that language. Instead of using the system default locale, one could specify a default locale for each application, and have applications speaking different languages running in the same system. Thus, the current locale provides full internationalization for your applications, provided that each DirectTalk Beans language is installed on the voice response node.

Normally, the current locale only affects the voice segments chosen to be played to the caller. But one can access the locale currently being used by the application, to determine the logic of the application.

Current locale is useful but one might want to specify the locale on the individual Media data beans in a multilingual application, where more than one language is needed. For example, you might have an application that asks the caller which language they want to use, with a voice segment for each language option. In such an application, you might want to set the current locale dynamically, after asking the caller which language they want. This would make the remainder of the application international.

It's up to the application developer how to use the user-defined variant component of the locale identifier. One might record voice segments for an application using different voices: male and female, for example.

A developer might identify these voice segments as, for example, en_US_male, en_US_female).

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5 A developer might have a different greeting at the beginning of an application, depending on which branch of your company the call is for, even though the logic of the application is the same for all branches. To achieve this, a locale identifier is created for each branch (for example, en_GB_romsey, en_GB_winchester, en_GB_salisbury). Then name each greeting voice segment using the appropriate locale identifier, and use different default locales to run instances of the application for each branch. The other voice segments in the application, common to all branches, should be in the base locale (en_GB).

10

Whenever a voice segment for a specific variant cannot be found, a voice segment for the country and language is searched for.

15 In some cases, a developer may want to use a language-only locale identifier, such as "en" or "fr". One example of this is the use of "en" as a locale identifier for the voice segments supplied for the tutorial application. These voice segments can be used when the current language of an application is any derivative of the en locale: en_US, en_GB, en_AU, and so on. Whenever a voice segment for a specific country cannot be found, a voice segment for the generic language is searched for.

20

25 Because some speech recognition and text-to-speech technologies are better at some languages than others, one can use different technologies for processing different languages. You specify one technology for "all locales" and then override this for the exceptional languages. This can be specified on a per node or per application basis. Specifying the technology for a new language or switching between technologies for any language is done without altering the application itself.

30

30 The Current application locale is assumed for all speech recognition attempts, and is used for text-to-speech unless specified on the TextToSpeech bean.

35

35 One can set the locale to be used while the application is running, either on the basis of the calling number or some other criteria (for example, a menu that asks the caller which language they want).

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The DirectTalk bean has a `currentLocale` property with corresponding `get` and `set` methods. When `makeCall` or `waitForCall` is invoked, the `currentLocale` property is set to the Default locale (page 43).

5 To change the locale during the application, invoke the `setCurrentLocale` method of the DirectTalk bean that initiated the call to set the new locale. This method sets the `currentLocale` property and passes the locale to the voice response node; this locale is now the locale used by the application. If you are using a visual builder, you can connect a
10 Locale from somewhere else to the `currentLocale` property of the DirectTalk bean. Setting the current locale in this way does not change the value of the locale in the application.

15 When an application finishes with the call and starts to handle a new call, the default locale is used again, rather than a locale that the application has switched to during the previous call. To reset the locale back to the default locale during a call, invoke the `setCurrentLocale` method of the DirectTalk bean that initiated the call, passing it a null parameter. To determine what locale the application is currently using,
20 invoke the `getCurrentLocale` method of the DirectTalk bean that initiated the call: this returns the `currentLocale`. You can change the behavior of the application, if necessary, depending on this value.

25 Not all applications are completely language-independent. You might want to mix the languages spoken by a single application. In this case, rather than changing the current locale, use the locale property of individual media beans to override the current locale.

30 Normally, the locale property of the media beans is not set, so that the default locale is used at runtime. This makes it very easy to develop an international application that automatically adapts itself to the local requirements (for example, in France, users hear French voice segments and in Britain, users hear U.K. English voice segments). However, you can
35 override the default locale by specifying a locale for the bean, for example, to develop a multilingual message.

Speech recognition in DirectTalk Beans Environment can be used without hard-coding the speech recognition technology inside the

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application. This means that you can switch from one technology to another without changing the application. In addition, different technologies can be used for different languages, again, without hard-coding anything in the application. (DirectTalk Beans applications are fully
5 language-independent.) To achieve this independence from technology and language, the plug-in class to be used for any individual recognition attempt is found using RecoService configuration entries and RecoDefinitions.

10 A RecoService configuration entry exists for each plug-in on each operating system platform you use in your DirectTalk Beans Environment plex. Each voice response system has a NodeName configuration entry, in which the relevant RecoService entries are identified. A RecoDefinition
15 contains two items of information: RecoType and locale identifier. RecoType is a platform-independent name for the speech recognition technology. The locale identifier identifies the languages for which this technology is to be used. The locale identifier can be an asterisk (*), indicating "all locales".

20 A RecoDefinitions can be stored in the NodeName configuration entry. These definitions apply to all applications run in the node, unless the RecoDefinitions are stored in an application's ApplicationProperties (while the application is being run from a visual builder or using the jre or java
25 command) or in the AppName configuration entry (when the application is run in a node). When an EntryField or Menu bean attempts to use speech recognition, the current locale of the application is used to find the appropriate RecoDefinition. The ApplicationProperties or the AppName configuration entry is searched first, and if a RecoDefinition is found for the locale, or for "all locales", it is used. If no RecoDefinition is found
30 for the locale, the NodeName configuration entry is searched.

35 The configuration entries needed for text-to-speech work in exactly the same way as the Configuration entries needed for speech recognition. Text-to-speech in DirectTalk Beans Environment can be used without hard-coding the text-to-speech technology inside the application. This means that you can switch from one technology to another without changing the application. In addition, different technologies can be used for different languages, again, without hard-coding anything in the application. (DirectTalk Beans applications are fully

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language-independent.) To achieve this independence from technology and language, the plug-in class to be used for converting text to speech for any individual TextToSpeech bean is found using TTSService configuration entries and TTSDefinitions.

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10 The steps of the method of the invention are described with reference to Figure 2. At step 1.1 the Caller dials from a telephone through the PBX into IVR and an application is opened to handle the call. A welcome message as specified by the application is played (step 1.2) to the caller over the open telephone line using defined prompts or text and a text to speech module. An IVR application instruction to initiate a recognition interaction (such as a field entry bean) is located (step 1.3) and speech technology is needed to perform the recognition interaction. Program control is passed to the technology selector which acquires the environment from the application instruction or from the application itself and then looks up (step 1.5) an appropriate speech technology from the hash table. The technology selector creates (step 1.6) an instance of the selected speech technology. Next technology selector chooses (step 1.7) an appropriate set of parameters for the speech technology by looking in the parameter hash table based upon the environment property of the interaction and now the actual task property of the interaction. Once the parameters have been chosen the speech technology starts the interaction (step 1.8). A voice prompt is played (step 1.9) eg "Please say your account number". A response is received and passed (step 1.10) from recogniser back to application. The IVR is able to recognise (step 1.11) the account number spoken by caller and enter it into a field for processing. The next instruction in the IVR application is acquired (step 1.12) and the interaction with caller is continued through the rest of the application.

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The parameters for a speech recognition operation will depend on the technology in use. Two examples are given here: Philips Speech Processing (formerly known as Voice Control Systems or VCS) and IBM ViaVoice.

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For Philips Speech Processing (PSP) it is necessary to select a vocabulary file and the sub vocabulary within that file. The vocabulary file is named according to the following:

llcctnsv

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where:

ll is a 2-letter language code

cc is a 2-letter primary country code

t is a single letter specifying the technology:

5 D Discrete

U Discrete/Cut-thru

A Alphanumeric

W Continuous

n is a single digit specifying the number of channels per DSP

10 s is a single digit specifying the number of sub-vocabularies

v is a single letter specifying the vocabulary version.

15 An example is ENUSD82A, which gives 8 channels of discrete
recognition for US English. There are two sub vocabularies within this
vocabulary file

20 The sub vocabularies contain different set of words, such as numbers,
simple control words and letters. For example the ENUSD82A vocabulary has
two sub vocabularies as follows:

VOCAB 1:

0 yes

1 no

2 help

25 3 cancel

4 stop

VOCAB 2:

0 one

30 1 two

2 three

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3 four
4 five
5 six
6 seven
7 eight
8 nine
9 zero
10 oh
11 stop

5

10

So for PSP the parameters that are looked up are the vocabulary and sub vocabulary, and both are dependent on both the locale and task: for the vocabulary, the locale is used to determine the language and country and the task to determine discrete, continuous, alphanumeric; and the sub vocabulary will depend on the task and also on the vocabulary, since vocabularies for different languages, countries etc. may have differing sub vocabularies.

15

For the implementation of ViaVoice on IBMs DirectTalk products, the parameters required to start recognition are an "engine" name and one or more grammar names.

20

The engine name selects a specific language model for the recognition - so, for example there will be a different engine name for each language, and for language models within a language that are set up for calls from land line or mobile telephone networks. The engine names are user definable and may vary from one installation to the next for the same type of engine - thus it is important that this information is contained in the configuration of the installation, rather than within the application. The engine name is clearly dependent on the locale.

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The grammar names select which recognition grammars will be used for the recognition, and so determine the possible results. Multiple grammars may be used for example to recognise numbers and help words at the same time. The grammar names are clearly dependent on the task required.

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5 In the present embodiment the environment is represented by a locale string that represents the language, the country and a "variant". The variant can be used to select for example land line, mobile or IP telephony language models, or regional variations in the language, or a combination of the two. The application takes information that it knows about the environment of the call and creates this locale string.

10 In an alternative embodiment, some or all of the environment information is gathered by the system and the locale string is created automatically. Factors such as the gender, language and local dialects can be determined by analysis of the callers voice. The type of telephone from which the call comes, land line, mobile or Internet telephony, may be determined from the calling number which is usually available to a voice response system.

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20 Now that the invention has been described by way of a preferred embodiment, various modifications and improvements will occur to those person skilled in the art. Therefore it should be understood that the preferred embodiment has been provided as an example and not as a limitation.

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CLAIMS

1. An interactive voice response (IVR) system having:

5 a plurality of speech technology modules, each module for receiving speech input from a user or producing speech output for a user;

10 a voice application defining a plurality of interactions between a caller and the speech technology modules;

each interaction having a task property and an interaction environment property;

15 a speech technology selection module for selecting, for each interaction, one of the speech technology modules from the plurality of the modules to be used by the application according to the environment property of the interaction.

20 2. An IVR as in claim 1 further comprising :

a plurality of parameter sets associated with each speech technology module;

25 a parameter selection module for selecting one of the parameter sets for use with the selected speech technology module according to the environment property of the interaction and the task property of the environment.

30 3. An IVR as in claim 1 wherein the environment property comprises a language identifier.

4. An IVR as in claim 1 wherein the environment property comprises a regional identifier.

35 5. An IVR as in claim 1 wherein the environment property comprises a call type identifier.

40 6. An IVR as in claim 1 wherein the application defines an application environment property and wherein an environment properties of an interaction takes priority.

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ABSTRACT

MANAGEMENT OF SPEECH TECHNOLOGY MODULES
IN AN INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE SYSTEM

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This publication relates to the management, in an interactive voice response system, of a plurality of speech technology modules. In particular it relates to an apparatus and a method for dynamically determining which of a plurality of speech technology modules to use during voice interaction between the system and a user. In prior art IVR systems each speech technology module is configured for a specific application or task. Most speech technology modules have different lexicons for the range of functions but it is the full lexicon which can determine an engines suitability for a language. For instance, one type of speech recognition engine is preferred for certain languages whereas IBM ViaVoice is a good general all rounder. Choosing one speech recognition module according to application or function alone is not entirely satisfactory and there is a need for improvement. The present solution is to select, for each interaction, one of the speech technology modules from the plurality of the modules to be used by the application according to the environment property of the interaction.

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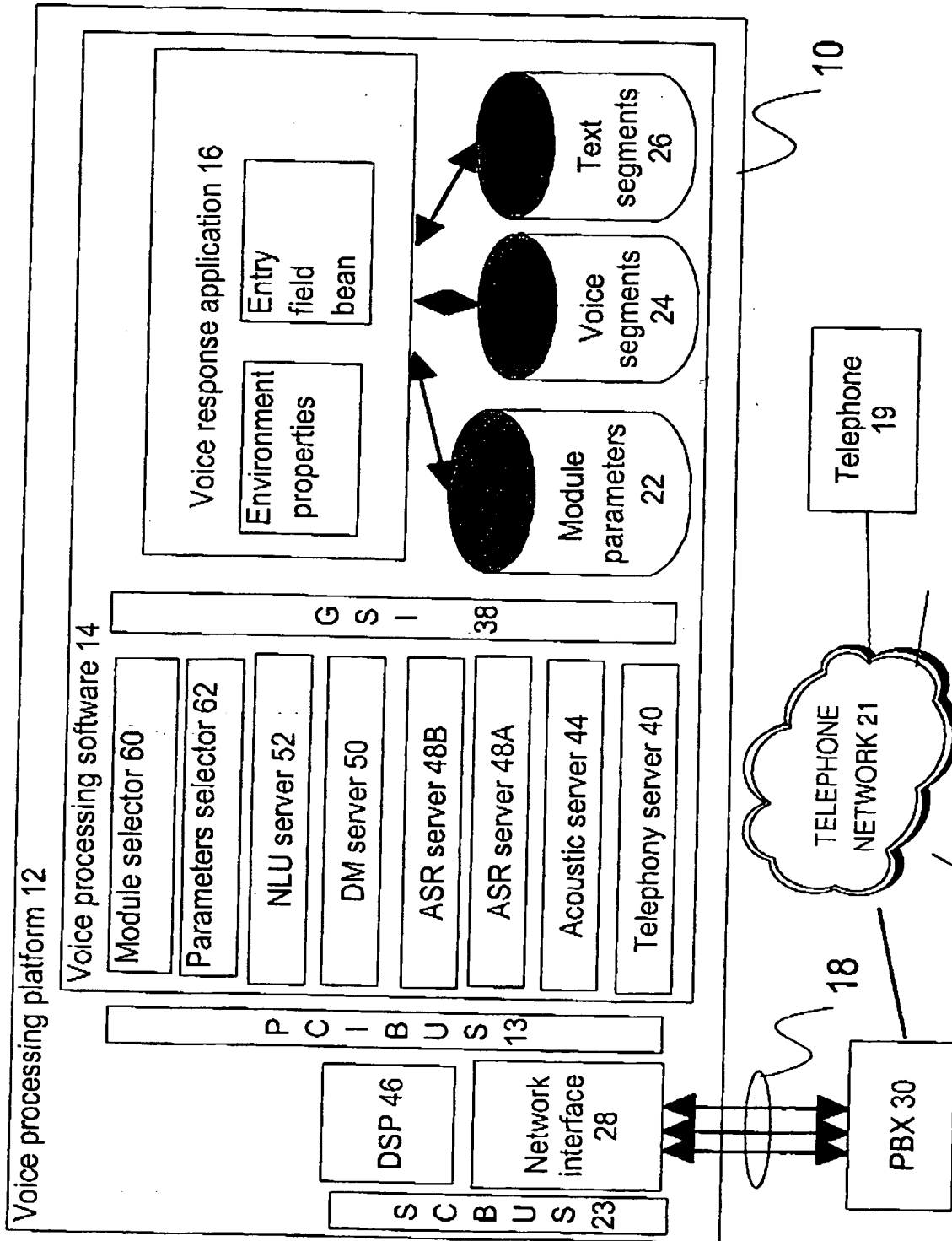


Figure 1

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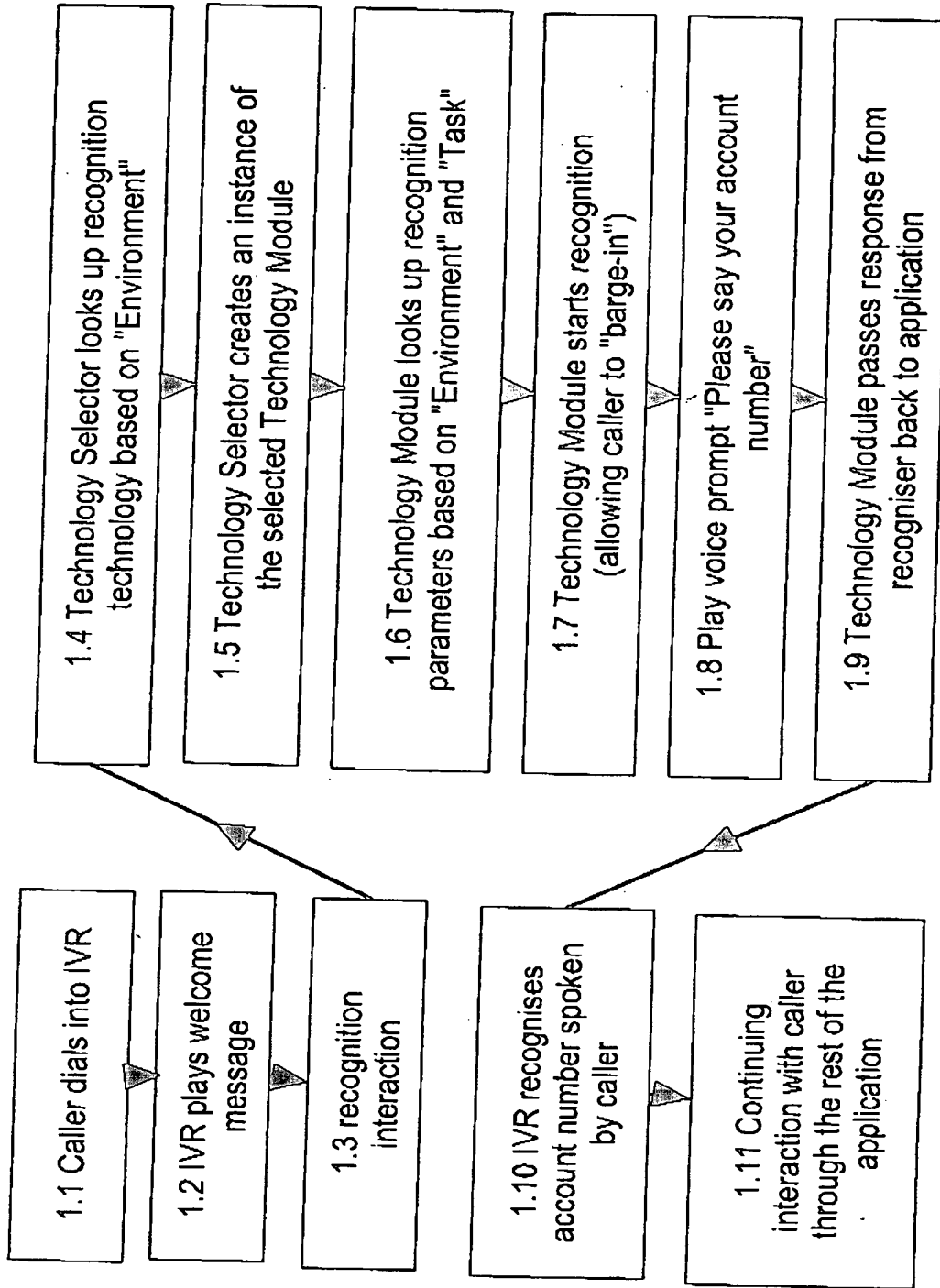


Figure 2

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